Dialogues in Philosophy, Mental and Neuro Sciences

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NEW IDEAS

A dialectic of questions for scientific and philosophical collaboration

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This brief essay raises the issue of whether or not the data of consciousness are accessible. Two positions are presented; 1) that they are not accessible and 2) that they are. This unresolved issue has plagued philosophy and cognitional theory for more than a few centuries. Presenting, as a new idea, in that it is time for this issue to be resolved to put the discussion to rest and provide a more viable foundation for the success of the sciences.

Keywords: Consciousness, Cognition, Lonergan, Philosophy, Epistemology

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This brief essay is submitted under the topics of "New Ideas" limiting its length to 1500 words. The purpose is to raise a few questions that might nudge communities to resolve a long-standing issue in cognitional theory. There are epistemological and cognitional issues that have pervaded the sciences and philosophy[1] for centuries but have become more acute in the 20th and 21st centuries due to the emergence of the social sciences and the various world crisis that have arisen. As much as these issues pertain to method in both the natural and social sciences, they are more problematic in the social sciences. Whereas the natural sciences focus on the data of sense, social science concerns itself with the human subject. This presents a problem in as much as focusing on the human subject as a datum of sense treats the person in the same manner that zoologists treat animal life. The basic problem is one of disagreement over what position on objectivity is scientifically correct and verifiable. The following two quotes point to the two different positions.

> Fodor's thesis: "that the central cognitive processes are not amenable to investigation; while the input systems have problem status, the central systems have mystery status; we can handle problems, but mysteries are beyond us." (quoted in Carston, 1988, p.57)

> "If the sciences of nature can be led astray by the blunder that the objective is, not the verified, but 'out there', so also can the human sciences; but while this blunder in physics yields no more than the ineptitude of Galileo's primary qualities and Newton's true motion, it leads zealous practitioners of scientific method in the human field to rule out of court a major portion of the data and so deny the empirical principle. Durkheimian sociology and behaviourist psychology may have excuses for barring the data of consciousness, for there exist notable difficulties in determining such data; but the business of the scientist is not to allege difficulties as excuses but to overcome them, and neither objectivity in the sense of verification nor the principle of empiricism can be advanced as reasons for ignoring the data of consciousness." (Lonergan, 1992, p.260)

Fodor's thesis claims that the data of consciousness is not able to be investigated. What evidence is there for this statement? Or what experiment has been provided to verify the statement? The second quotation, by Bernard Lonergan, claims that the data of consciousness is able to be investigated and that it can be achieved by invoking the empirical principle and the process of verification. Which view is correct and how are we to resolve this dichotomy? The view of contemporary science is supported by the notion that objectivity is what is separate from the human mind and what is of the human mind is subjective, therefore an inhibition in attempting to reach truth or verified conclusions. Let me return to the multiplicity of views on reality and theories of cognition. Every philosopher and scientist would claim that their view or position is intelligent and reasonable. We all have that in common about our different views. Is that possible? How can different views of what is

intelligence, be intelligent and reasonable when they differ about how our minds work and what is knowing and what is knowledge? These are questions to be resolved if science is to achieve a greater degree of unity in providing foundations for more adequate control of meaning raising the statistics of effective progress.

Would it help to discuss the implications of both positions? Much of academic discourse is taken up with discussing the merits of one view or another or comparing views and again one holds such work to be intelligent and reasonable. If in fact we could settle the issue would not philosophy better contribute to scientific methodology and scientists attain a common ground, a foundation that would issue in a form of collaboration unhindered by discussions of differing positions on cognitional theory and epistemological issues? Philosophy is currently mired in sustaining value in the academic world and that will continue as long as these issues remain as disputes by which one can make a living.

Bernard Lonergan's claim is that the operations of the mind are accessible through what he called self-appropriation which is accomplished by reflecting on one's performance when engaged in puzzling, thinking, or doing some science (Lonergan, 1992). The same empirical principle that the natural scientist applies to the data of sense, Lonergan applies to the operations of consciousness. How is this achieved? Such response requires a book such as Lonergan's *Insight*. In definition form, by adverting to our own operations we are empirically becoming aware of these operations and can proceed from there to understanding them. One begins with such awareness when involved with thinking, with doing some science. These operations are the data of the human sciences due to their purely human presence in the minds of men and women.

Are these operations of our thinking mysteries or occurrences that go on in each of us and can be understood? We use terms such as curiosity, insight, judgment and decision frequently in reference to cognitional operations. What data are we referring to when we use such terms? (Henman, 2015)[2] Without any data reference, are we involved in scientific discussion?

Is there something worth solving here? Would it be a "New Idea" to attempt this work?

The questions offered in this brief essay require answers if we are to resolve this issue. If objectivity is achieved through authentic subjectivity, which means raising and answering all the relevant questions concerning some datum, then there is a challenge to meet what both philosophy and scientific methodologists have yet to face. A healthy dialectic would venture into attempting once and for all to end the notion that all views on the human mind that differ are intelligent and reasonable. David Hume had a view of mind, did his view square with how his own mind, or yours, actually works? (Lonergan, 1992, p.414)

REFERENCES

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Endnotes:

1. The views of dualism, epiphonema, physicalism dominate discussions due to no settled perspective. Philosophies range from empiricism, idealism, rationalism, pragmatism, linguistic and more, beginning with Plato, through Kant, Hume, Hegel, and on and on. Scientists often refer to the social sciences as the soft sciences indicating a lower status.
2. This article, where I explore some of the issues with language use in scientific procedures., is also available as *Global Collaboration: Neuroscience as Paradigmatic* (2016) Axial Publishing, Vancouver, BC and on Amazon

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